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CASTLE ISLAND 350

METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COMMISSION

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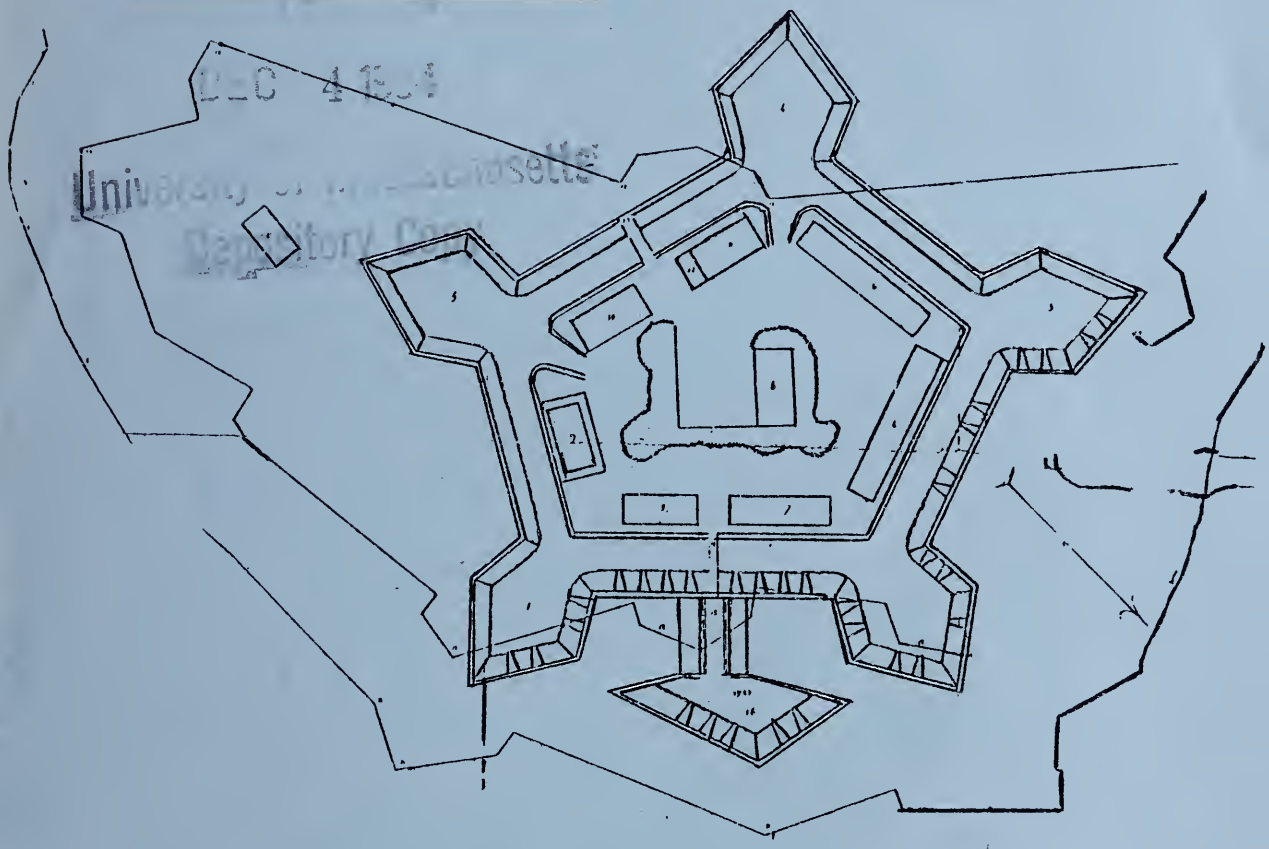
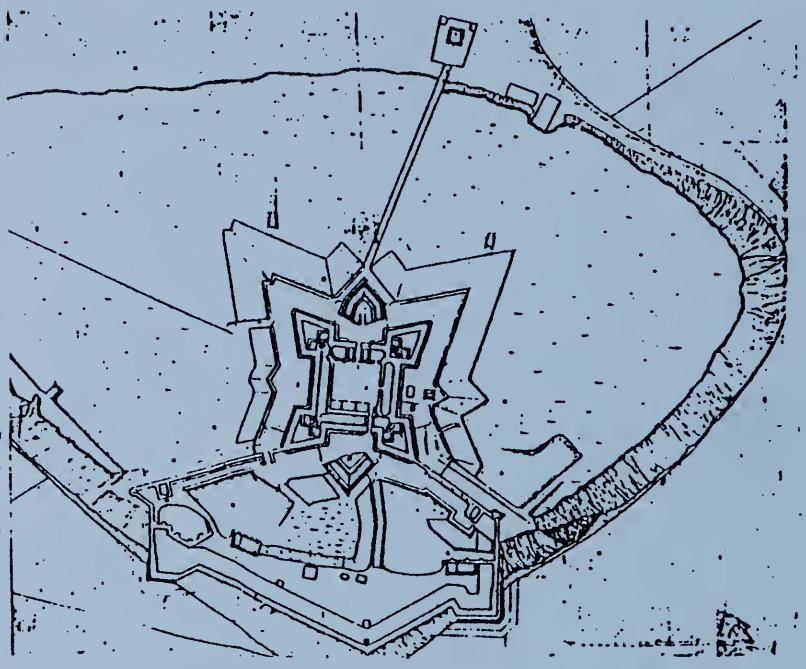


1801 fort atop 1777 fort outline

On July 29, 1634, Governor Thomas Dudley chose Castle Island as the site of Boston's first inner-harbor fortification. Completed in 1635, this small earthwork with two platforms mounting three guns was the first of eight fortifications to be constructed on Castle Island.

Fear of attack by England's enemies, the Netherlands and France, caused the province of Massachusetts to build three more fortifications on Castle Island in the seventeenth century: a stone, timber, and earth fort (1645); a timber-faced fort (1654); and a four-bastioned stone fort (1674).

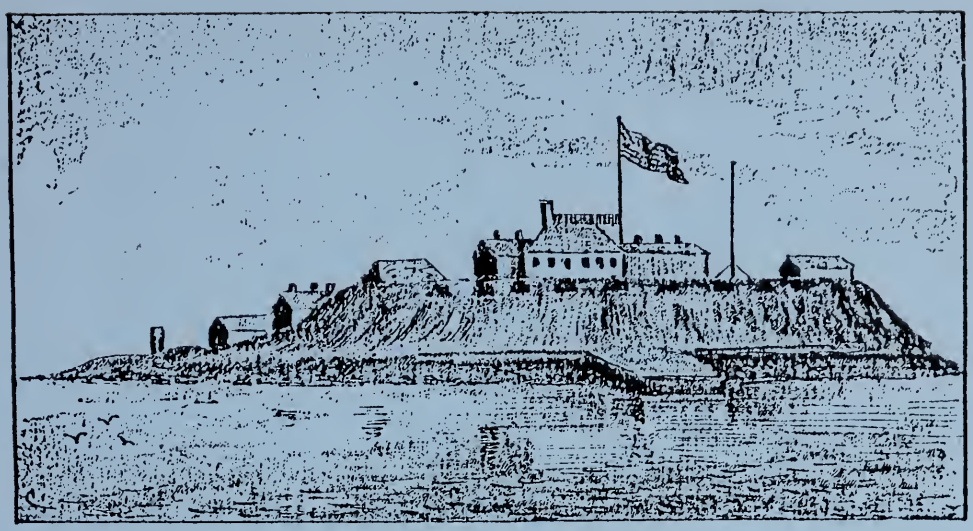
In 1701, the Crown sent Colonel Wilhelm Wolfgang Romer to supervise construction of Castle Island's fifth fortification. The four-bastioned brick fort, called Castle William in honor of the king, was completed in 1703.



Castle William, 1705

Castle William became a refuge for provincial governors and royal officials seeking escape from the unrest caused by the Stamp Act, Boston Massacre, and the Boston Tea Party. The Crown took possession of Castle Island from the provincial government in 1770, and retained control until the British evacuation of Boston in March 1776. The British then leveled the works and disabled the guns of Castle William, thus ending 142 years of colonial defense.

Colonial forces under Colonel John Trumbull took command of Castle Island and began construction of the Island's sixth fortification, a combined earthwork and double palisade. Lieutenant Colonel Paul Revere was in charge of repairing the guns left by the British. Though serving as a defense and as a prison for British troops, the Castle saw no combat in the Revolutionary War.



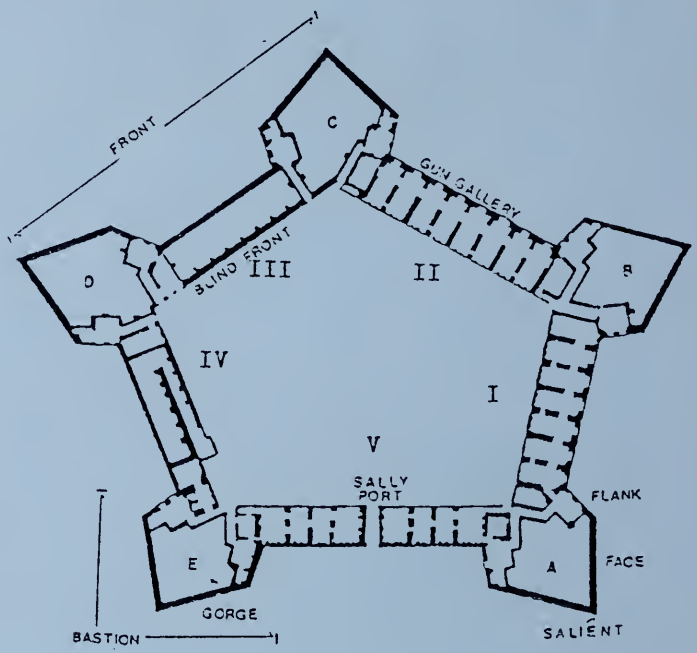
The Castle, c.1780

After the Revolution, Castle Island served as a state prison, naval hospital, and prison for French sailors captured in the 1798 undeclared war with France. In 1798, Massachusetts ceded the Island to the federal government, and the following year the Castle was renamed Fort Independence by President John Adams. Between 1801-1803, Colonel Jean Foncin engineered construction of the Island's seventh fortification, a five-bastioned brick work.

By the 1830s, the brick-faced Fort Independence was outdated, and the Army Corps of Engineers detached Colonel Sylvanus Thayer to supervise construction of the eighth fortification on Castle Island. Completed between 1834-1851, the present Fort Independence is a five-bastioned masonry work with multi-tiered gun emplacements. It was designed as a secondary seacoast defense against unarmored sail and steam ships mounting short-range smooth-bore guns.

During the Civil War, Fort Independence served as a secondary seacoast defense for Boston Harbor, as well as a recruiting, training, and ordnance-testing post. The advent of rifled cannon, with their improved range and velocity, made forts like Independence obsolete, and thus the Fort was decommissioned and reduced to caretaker status in 1879.

Castle Island became part of the Boston park system in 1890, but Fort Independence was returned to the federal government for use as a torpedo station during the Spanish-American War, as an observation and identification station during World War I, and as part of the harbor command system during World War II. Following deactivation of the Castle Island Signal Corps, the Metropolitan District Commission purchased both the Fort and the Island from the U.S. Army in the 1960s. The Commission began Phase I restoration of Fort Independence in 1976, and commenced Phase II restoration in 1984.



Fort Independence is owned and operated by the Metropolitan District Commission as part of its Reservations and Interpretive Services Unit. Tours of the Fort are conducted by the historical committee of the Castle Island Association on Saturdays and Sundays, May through October, from noon to 3:30.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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For more information, call Fort Independence at (617) 268-5744.